

## Don Christensen's Funeral Remarks

Bishop Cameron Ford, July 6, 2018

When a loved one passes, it often causes many of us to stop and reflect on the purpose of life. At one time or another, most of us have wondered if there really is a purpose to it all. We wonder if there really is a God; if there really is life after death. This is natural because in life we are given no certain proofs one way or the other. Those that put energy into looking for reasons not to believe will find success in their quest. Those willing to put in the effort to look for reasons to believe will also find plenty. I have found it to be pretty well balanced. The only real certain proof is that which comes from the Spirit. It is intended to be that way. We are required to walk by faith. We are given the choice of good or evil, of repentance and forgiveness or self justification, of kindness or selfishness, of building or destroying. The absence of absolute proof forces us to reveal by our choices who we really are deep inside, and what we really love.

But in modern times, among a larger and larger percentage of the world, an obsession with the attitude of skepticism and doubt has become almost a religion; an anti-religion religion. In a past address, President Thomas S Monson makes mention of one such man that was absolutely certain in his skepticism and doubt, that was eventually changed by the power of love. He said:

“Robert Blatchford, in his book *God and My Neighbor*, attacked with vigor the accepted Christian beliefs, such as God, Christ, prayer, and immortality. He boldly asserted: “I claim to have proved everything I set out to prove so fully and decisively that no Christian, however great or able he may be, can answer my arguments or shake my case.” He surrounded himself with a wall of skepticism. Then a surprising thing happened. His wall suddenly crumbled to dust. He was left exposed and undefended. Slowly he began to feel his way back to the faith he had scorned and ridiculed. What caused this profound change in his outlook? His wife died. With a broken heart, he went into the room where all that was mortal of her lay. He looked again at the face he loved so well. Coming out, he said to a friend “It is she and yet it is not she. Everything changed. Something that was there before is taken away. She is not the same. What can be gone if it be not the soul?” Later he wrote: “Death is not what some people imagine. It is only like going into another room. In that other room we shall find ...the dear women and men and the sweet children we have loved and lost.” –Thomas Monson, April 1990 *Ensign*

I testify that there is a purpose to life. We are here to gain a body and to learn who we really are; what we really love, and who we really love. But it is also true that life can sometimes be so painful and confusing that we can forget who we are and what we really love. Life is hard; at times unbearably so. So how do we endure the bitterness of life without becoming bitter ourselves? In this I think we can find an answer in the life of Don Christensen.

It has seemed to me that brother Christensen suffered with more than his fair share of trials; years and years of depression, followed by cancer. Sister Christensen has shared with me how he suffered with about 20 years of depression. His best years, when he was really himself, were his first 10 years of marriage and about the last 8 years of his life. And yet despite all of this suffering and challenge, in my experience, to come into the presence of Don Christensen was to be showered with love. We as a bishopric would visit the Christensen's from time to time to try to love and comfort them, and would instead come away feeling loved and comforted ourselves by this gentle, tender hearted man. To serve Don, was to be served. Our Young Men and Young women have had the privilege of being fawned over, praised by, and loved by Don each week as they provided the Sacrament and a spiritual thought to the Christensen's. I will be forever grateful for his gentle influence on my two sons. During the last week or so of his life, our Elder's and High Priests had the privilege of being ministered to by Don as they helped get him into bed. Their service could not have been given to a more grateful recipient.

For Christmas one year, my wife and I gave the Christensen's a little framed image depicting all of the different names of Christ. You would have thought that we had given him a million dollars. He wrote us a thank you card written in his shaky handwriting, thanked me on the phone, and proudly displayed it in their living room. And yet in truth, I believe this response beautifully demonstrates what Don and Rhea value more than all the money in the world: Christ and His Gospel. I believe that was where Don's true strength came from.

During his mortal ministry, our Savior said:

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." John 11:25-26

We usually just think of physical death when we read this passage. But I find it curious that he states this renewal of life is for those that believe in Him. We know from other scriptures that physical resurrection, Christ's triumph over physical death, is a universal gift to all mankind regardless of righteousness or belief. So what kind of resurrection can He be referring to in this passage?

I believe that Christ is declaring in this passage that for those that believe in Him, His atoning sacrifice overcomes all forms of death: The death of faith; the death of hope; the death of love; the death of kindness and compassion. These other kinds of deaths can be every bit as tragic as physical death; sometimes more so.

I believe that, like the water the Savior transformed into wine, because of Brother Christensen's faith in Him, the Lord was eventually able to transform the challenging experiences of Don's life into

overflowing expressions of kindness and love to those around him. Faith in Christ brought life, when in other circumstances there would have only been bitterness and despair. Faith in Christ revealed the true Don Christensen and clearly demonstrated who he really was and what he really loved. To those that spent any time with him, it was clear that he was a compassionate loving man, and what he loved was Christ and his family. Brother Christensen exemplifies that the greatest miracles performed by Christ are those He performs inside our hearts.

In closing, I want to share with you the words of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland:

“I testify that God lives, that He is our Eternal Father, that He loves each of us with a love divine. I testify that Jesus Christ is His Only Begotten Son in the flesh and, having triumphed in this world, is an heir of eternity, a joint-heir with God, and now stands on the right hand of His Father. I testify that this is Their true Church and that They sustain us in our hour of need—and always will, even if we cannot recognize that intervention. Some blessings come soon, some come late, and some don’t come until heaven; but for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, *they come.*” —*An High Priest of Good Things to Come, Oct 1999*

I also testify of Christ and the goodness of His blessings. I testify that because of Him, we can all rise again in every sense of the word. He lives. He is the truth, the way, and the life. He deserves our love, our devotion, and our loyalty.

And I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.